

Tilley Award 2003

Anti- social Use of Motor Vehicles Blackwood Town Centre

Category: Crime and Disorder Reduction

Heddlu Gwent Police

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Anti – Social Use of Motor Vehicles Blackwood Town Centre
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Introduction

Historically Blackwood Town Centre has always been a social meeting place for all generations. Ranging from teenagers to senior citizens: who meet on the town centre and use the various arts, entertainment, fast food outlets, licensed premises and restaurants. It is the busiest beat area for disorder and traffic incidents in Blackwood. The ownership of cars amongst young people aged between 17-25 years increased during the 1990s, producing a new phenomenon. Other town centre users including residents complained that their quality of life was being disturbed by the behaviour of the *Boy Racers* (the label given to them by the public and media). The behaviour complained about consisted of: -

- Driving erratically, with excessive speed, turning manoeuvres associated road traffic collisions and obstruction.
- Anti – social behaviour and intimidation of members of the public and residents.

The previous uncoordinated reactive response had not stopped the problem. Evidence of and intelligence about the behaviour was gathered from Police data and colleagues at Caerphilly County Borough Council. Community intelligence was also gathered from public meetings, elected representatives and media articles. Mathematical analysis of the problem was difficult due to lack of database recording. There was no doubt however that the phenomenon existed.

An effective adoption of problem orientated partnership work was needed. Since 1999 the partners involved have been Gwent Police, Caerphilly County Borough Council, Private Retailers, Developers of the new Retail Development and various Blackwood Town Centre Groups. The following objectives were agreed in order to help to tackle the causes of and incidents involving *Boy Racers*.

- Enforcement of loud noise nuisance legislation.
- Enforce speed limit.
- Extend the 30 mph throughout the complaint area.
- Enforce all relevant legislation.
- Enforce Public Nuisance Legislation.
- Enforce eating and loud noise nuisance legislation in car parks.
- Close car parks.
- Extension of the no waiting zone in the complaint area.
- Restrict offender behaviour through crime prevention and traffic calming measures.
- Installation of CCTV cameras.
- Reduce offender behaviour through education.

There has been success with the perception of the community being that progress has been made with the *Boy Racers*; this is confirmed by a 39 % reduction in the reports received. The approach to the problem has been a long term holistic one, which is continuously being assessed and adapted.

The Problem

Historically Blackwood Town Centre has been a social meeting place for all generations. Ranging from teenagers to senior citizens; who meet on the town centre and use the various arts, entertainment, fast food outlets, licensed premises and restaurants. It produces the highest figures for disorder and traffic incidents at Blackwood Police Section.

High Street is also the main A4048 trunk road that runs straight through the town centre of Blackwood (see appendix 1). As a result anyone driving North or South on the A4048 passes through the High Street and witnesses the behaviour of any persons present.

During the 1990s ownership of vehicles amongst young people aged between 17-25 years increased. Other town centre users including residents complained that their quality of life was being disturbed by the behaviour of the *Boy Racers* (the label they were given by the public and media, and it should be noted that the term includes females). The complaints were: -

- Driving erratically, turning manoeuvres associated road traffic collisions, obstruction, on roads and also in car parks belonging to either Caerphilly County Borough Council (CCBC) or private retailers.
- Anti – social behaviour and intimidation of members of the public and residents by the *Boy Racers* and also by other youths who gathered to meet them. There were complaints about the morality of these youths and the manner in which females in the group dressed.
- Nuisance congestion and delay to other road users caused by repeated driving along the A4048 between Pontllanfraith and the Rock Blackwood in order to complete a circuit of the town centre.
- Danger to other road users caused by allegations of High Speed driving north of High street on Old Tredegar road on the A4048.
- Danger and nuisance to other car park users caused by the *Boy Racers*.
- Danger nuisance caused to other users of, and residents adjacent to the car parks, perceived loss of privacy and nuisance.
- Alleged misuse of alcohol and drug abuse inside vehicles by the young people.
- Associated Road Traffic Collisions.

The main complaint times were between 5pm and 11pm (disorder after this time is usually associated with the many public houses and clubs, that are located on the town centre). There were allegations of up to seventy vehicles gathering on some evenings.

Evidence of and intelligence about the behaviour was gathered from the following sources: -

- Complaints recorded on computer logs on the force command and control system (appendix 2).
- Letters of complaint written by those affected by the problem (appendix 3).

- Sectional and traffic patrol officers who worked in the Blackwood Town area.
- Community meetings including Blackwood Town Council, Blackwood Town Centre Management Group and other residents groups.
- Police Liaison Groups.
- Information and complaints received from the local Councillors.
- Colleagues at CCBC.
- Young people from the groups complained about.

Members of these groups included residents, licensees, retailers, councillors as well as representatives from the police and CCBC.

Precise analysis of the full extent of the problem was difficult, as many of the complaints were made at public meetings and, or to elected representatives, and had not been reported directly to the police. Failure on behalf of most of the complainants to take vehicle index numbers meant that few offenders were being specifically identified. There was evidence to corroborate some of the complaints made. The numbers of young drivers had increased throughout the 1990s and police officers had been attending incidents for some years. Road Traffic Collision Data appeared to corroborate the complaints of poor driving, though it must be noted that currently no specific data is collected to indicate that collisions involve *Boy Racers*.

It was apparent that due to media amplification of the problem and demands being made for immediate control, that there was an element of moral panic involved. The public perception of the behaviour of the young persons involved being equated, to that of the new social phenomenon of '*Cruising*' nationally. Where many hundreds of '*Cruisers*' gathered together in car parks to race, complete handbrake turns and set vehicles on fire. Fortunately in comparison the numbers involved in Blackwood was small.

The public needed reassurance that they were safe in their community, and that their concerns were being listened to. There was a generation gap between most of the complainants (most of who were over fifty years of age) and those being complained about. Recognition needed to be given to the fact that not all the young people using the town centre were involved, despite the fact that the media, and some of the complainants had labelled all young drivers in the town centre area as *Boy Racers*. Unreasonable demands were made by some for the police to deal with the *Boy Racers*, in a draconian manner that would amount to discriminatory practice, harassment, unlawful arrest and breaches of legislation including the Human Rights Act.

However, the fact remained that a limited number of young drivers were behaving in the manner described above. The difficulty was how to reduce and prevent this behaviour. Those involved needed to be educated about the effect their behaviour was having on other members of the community. Previous experience had confirmed that most of the offenders did not commit offences in front of uniformed police officers. But officers needed to be in full uniform, to stop the vehicles, identify offenders and enforce most of the relevant legislation.

The Solution

Problem Orientated Policing (POP) appeared to be an effective solution, as the response needed to be Holistic, partnership based and realistic. Draconian enforcement of legislation by the police service would not and had not provided a long-term solution.

Police officers had not been able to effectively control the behaviour of groups of drivers. The logistics of witnessing offending behaviour and stopping all those involved meant that effective enforcement would require the use of more police resources, than was available on a daily basis. The only way to do this was to mount specific operations that enabled more resources to be on duty, often accompanied by colleagues from CCBC in order to enforce all available legislation.

Since 1999 Gwent Police and CCBC had worked together and alongside the various groups that had formed in the town centre. So that long term solutions could be worked out. It was accepted that management of the problem was needed, as it would not be possible to totally eradicate the use of Blackwood Town Centre as a meeting place for young people. Nor desirable as the wish was to stop offending behaviour, not stop young people using the facilities located in the town centre.

The public and complainants also needed to be educated; they were encouraged to contact the police when the behaviour was occurring. The importance of taking vehicle index numbers was stressed to them. The fact that this would increase the number of incidents being officially reported to the police was taken into consideration.

The ongoing development of Blackwood Town Centre would bring changes, that were likely to have an effect on both the future behaviour of the *Boy Racers*, their associates and the quality of life for those persons using and living in the town centre area of Blackwood. Decisions needed to be made with regards to the siting of street furniture, traffic routes, walkways, public open spaces, car parks, other civic areas and meeting places. Therefore it was essential that Gwent Police were involved in this and that Section 17 (1) of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 was fully embraced.

'Without prejudice to any other obligation imposed on it, it shall be the duty of each authority to which this section applies to exercise its various functions with due regard to the likely effect on the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder in this area.'

It was decided in consultation with all groups, that the following objectives were to be the focus of a strategy that would help to reduce the problem of the *Boy Racers* and the associated anti-social behaviour through education, management and enforcement.

- Enforcement of general road traffic legislation.
- Enforce speed limit on A4048.
- Enforce noise and public nuisance law.
- Enforce eating, loud music and parking overnight in car parks.

- To implement a speed limit of 30 mph throughout the complaint area.
- Extension of prohibited waiting in the complaint area.
- Installation of CCTV cameras.
- Encourage the installation of target hardening on the new retail development to prevent an extension of the problem.
- Prevent/ restrict turning via side roads.
- Close car parks at certain times to prevent nuisance behaviour.
- Install Traffic Calming Measures.
- Traffic calming in car parks and on High Street.
- Enforce Anti- Social Behaviour Legislation.
- The introduction of new legislation where necessary to prevent nuisance behaviour.

The above objectives complement both the Gwent Police Policing Aims and the joint Community Safety Strategy of Gwent Police, CCBC, Gwent Health Authority and the National Probation Service. Listed below: -

- To take targeted action to reduce road traffic collisions.
- To take targeted action to reduce disorder incidents.
- To take targeted action to divert young people (under 25) from lifestyles linked to crime and disorder.
- To take targeted action to reduce the fear of crime and disorder.
- To improve the way the public is consulted.

(See appendix 10)

The objectives called for a two- tier approach. The enforcement and education of offenders, and the ongoing background processes that would address legislative and other long-term measures. Intelligence brought to sectional tasking provides a continuous process of assessment of the project. The decision is made to try new approaches when it is apparent that something has not worked. This has been a success, as where displacement occurs or calls increase necessary action is taken to enforce front-line legislation. The measures that have been taken since are detailed below.

Miscellaneous Traffic Offences

The general condition of most of the vehicles used by the young people was very good. A list of the offences that were considered by police officers is attached at appendix 4. Throughout the duration of the project, many hundreds of vehicles have been stopped and checked by police officers from various departments. A very small number have failed to use the Gwent Police Vehicle Defect Rectification scheme, resulting in a summons being issued.

As the project progressed further research and evaluation took place that resulted in the warning notices attached at appendix 5, being handed out to drivers.

Details of any apparent modifications made to vehicles were passed onto insurance companies; no fraudulent declarations were detected.

Speed Enforcement

Traffic assisted the section with several methods of speed enforcement. Including use of handheld devices and cameras. However intelligence gathered, confirms that there had been a public misconception about the speed of the *Boy Racers*. Less than five percent of those exceeding the speed limit formed part of the *Boy Racers* Group. The reality has been that members of the public who had complained about the speed of the *Boy Racers* and demanded enforcement were caught themselves.

The Safety Camera Unit, has the A4048 High Street Blackwood listed as an enforcement site. To date the unit has detected over 251 offenders once again intelligence confirms that very few of those caught speeding have been *Boy Racers*. It remains a site because of the Fatal Traffic Collisions that have occurred not because of the *Boy Racers*. This coincidental siting has assisted the project by reducing speed in the complaint area.

Noise Nuisance

Many of the young people were playing very loud music in their vehicles whilst driving up and down, or whilst parked outside homes. Allegations of mobile 'discos' were frequent. The noise was causing a disturbance to the residents and users of the town centre. A joint approach involving the local environmental health officers and the police was used to combat this problem. Using legislation under: -

Section 62 Control of Pollution Act 1974, which would restrict the use of a loudspeaker in streets and car parks between 2100 and 0800 so as to give reasonable cause for annoyance to people in the vicinity.

And

The Noise and Statutory Nuisance Act 1993. A vehicle emitting such a level of noise in a street to be a statutory nuisance.

Environmental health officers can only enforce the latter. Thus police officers assisted in stopping vehicles. Over one hundred warning letters have been given to drivers (see appendices 6 and 7). Three noise abatement notices were served upon persistent offenders and one seizure of stereo equipment and successful prosecution that resulted in a £500 fine.

Public Nuisance

Throughout the duration of this project, limited success had been gained with this offence as previously collection of evidence from non-police witnesses, was both time consuming and provided little corroboration of the identity of offenders. Their homes were located so that they could not see the cars and the drivers.

However due to continued research by Gwent Police, the success of West Midlands Police at Dudley (regarding the problem of cruising on a much larger scale than experienced at Blackwood) in prosecuting drivers using a shopping centre to cruise. The same approach was tried at Blackwood, video recording of the behaviour of the *Boy Racers* was carried out by police officers, and other police officers then stopped the vehicles identified. The details of the offenders were obtained and logged.

This now provided officers with a list of vehicles involved. The drivers and passengers were given a warning notice (see appendix 5). It was made plain that full police powers would be used if the offending behaviour continued. This proved highly successful and the problem reduced drastically.

Traffic Management

At the commencement of the project, the main complaint area the town centre car parks, side roads and the A4048 High Street Blackwood had varying speed limits, very little traffic calming, limited prohibition of waiting areas, and was effectively a long, straight, wide road with one mini roundabout at the south end. This all assisted the behaviour complained about. The partnership worked together on this, new planning applications were considered, and reports submitted. Not all of the recommendations of the group were adopted. The result to date however has resulted in: -

- The installation of two new sets of traffic lights along the length of the complaint area.
- The re-siting of a pelican crossing, in between the traffic lights.
- Traffic islands installed, posts erected, traffic pillows, carriageway marking and pavement widening at strategic locations to prevent, double-parking, over-taking manoeuvres, obstruction and hand brake turns by drivers.
- The introduction of 'no waiting' zones adjacent to the homes of residents affected by the gathering of *Boy Racers*.
- Varying speed limits introduced, including a 20mph zone in residential streets and the reduction down to 30mph on High Street in a section that had been 40mph and an adjacent section of the A4048 down to 40mph from 50mph.

All of the above have taken place over a four year period, and the correct procedures and guidelines were used to bring the relevant, traffic orders and local orders into being.

Installation of Closed Circuit Television Video Cameras (CCTV)

At the outset, it was apparent that the '*Boy Racers*' were well aware that there was no CCTV in the complaint areas. Some appeared to believe that if there was no police presence that they could do as they wished. The successful bid to the Welsh Assembly meant that the public car parks and almost all of High Street Blackwood, would be covered by the public CCTV system, to be installed by CCBC. The car park cameras were installed during 2002, with the cameras on High Street going live in January 2003.

Direct Consultation during 2000 and 2001 between the police and the contractors and retailers on the new development meant that PRIVATE CCTV would cover private areas that could be easily accessed by the public. The result has been that CCTV now covers over 95 % of the town centre area, this affords surveillance of the main complaint areas. This has proved to be an effective detection tool for those who were determined to continue their nuisance behaviour when moved off the High Street by police officers. (Please refer to car parks)

Car parks

Over the year's private retailers such as Aldis, Blackwood Market Place had secured their car parks at night with either gates or barriers, following advice from the police. Some have also installed CCTV. This has stopped the offending behaviour of the *Boy Racers* in those Car Parks. The heightened police and CCBC enforcement on the High Street led to a displacement of the *Boy Racers* into the other car parks of Blackwood. With complaints once again received about their noisy, anti-social behaviour infringing on the privacy of the lives of nearby residents.

The partnership looked at how they could solve this new area of complaint. Due to the fact that not all of the public car parks could be shut at night. The response to this was to introduce a local order that prevented the car parks being used for any reason other than parking. Prior to enforcement the police and highways department of CCBC visited the area. Warning notices were handed out. The reason for the notices was explained to the cruisers and they appear to have listened to the advice they were given. The CCTV system was used to identify offenders. The number of *Boy Racers* offending in car parks has been limited to ten since September 2002. Thus education of the offenders has worked.

Another CCBC car park that was not covered by the CCTV system, became subject of complaint, the partnership decided that the answer was to close the car park after the retail outlets on the town centre had shut. A barrier has been erected that is locked shut during the evenings and overnight. There have been no more problems at that location.

Agreement was made with the developers of the Blackwood North Retail Development, that barriers and or CCTV would be used to prevent the displacement of the *Boy Racers* onto their property once the stores close. CCTV now covers 99% of the car parks used by the public.

Youth Provision

Consultation with the youths that gather on the town centre at Blackwood by Gwent Police and Youth Outreach Workers met with the complaint that there was little provision of facilities for them, other than specific arts and entertainment classes at Blackwood Miners Institute that had to be paid for. As a result the Community Education department at CCBC has sought to provide: -

- The Basement –located in the basement of Blackwood Library next to High Street. Provides facilities four times a week, for a maximum of forty young people aged between 13 years – 21years. It provides information and advises on all issues to the youths, who visit Blackwood, Information Technology facilities including the World Wide Web are also available for use.
- Blackwood Youth centre that has been totally refurbished to include a gymnasium. This provides Community Education for young people aged between 8 years and 17 years three nights a week.

Media

The media had played a role in amplifying the problem of the boy racers, by making comparisons to the phenomenon experienced at a national level. It was important to keep them involved in order to advertise the fact that action was being taken in order to reduce and prevent an increase of the cruising problem. To be fair to local newspapers they have always been supportive of the action being taken to by the partnership. Headlines such 'Crackdown on the Boy Racers' (South Wales Argus, Tuesday 1st May 2001), 'Racers Beware' and 'Winning the war against car cruisers' (See appendix 8). This has also provided a useful advertisement tool in order to discourage further offending behaviour. It also provided an effective means of informing the registered keepers of many of the vehicles involved, what was occurring on Blackwood Town Centre. They were often the parents of the *boy racers* who had no idea of what their grown up children were doing in their vehicles (without breaching the data protection act by contacting them directly).

The *Boy Racers* also used the media, and as the WWW page in Appendix 9 shows there was a hard-core that believed that they were not doing any wrong. The police response to this was to place no waiting cones in the vicinity of the area identified for the cruise. In reality no great numbers of vehicles turned up, illustrating that the Blackwood *Boy Racers* are not part of the hard-core national group of cruisers.

Cost

Other than funding acquired for specific police operations over the last three years, that amounts to £13,500. The exact cost of the project is difficult to analyse. No single department at CCBC has kept a running total of costs involved. Gwent Police has also not kept running totals of work hours involved. At least twelve officers from CCBC departments and six different departments of the police service have been involved in this long-term project.

Conclusion

It has become clear throughout the duration of the project, that the consultation with the public has improved, that may account for the initial rise in reported incidents to Gwent Police (see appendix 2). Since that period however year on year there has been a reduction in the reported incidents. The public has also realised that if strict enforcement is demanded then it applies to everyone, not young people that they have

picked out. There has been success with the perception of the community being that progress has been made with the *Boy Racers*.

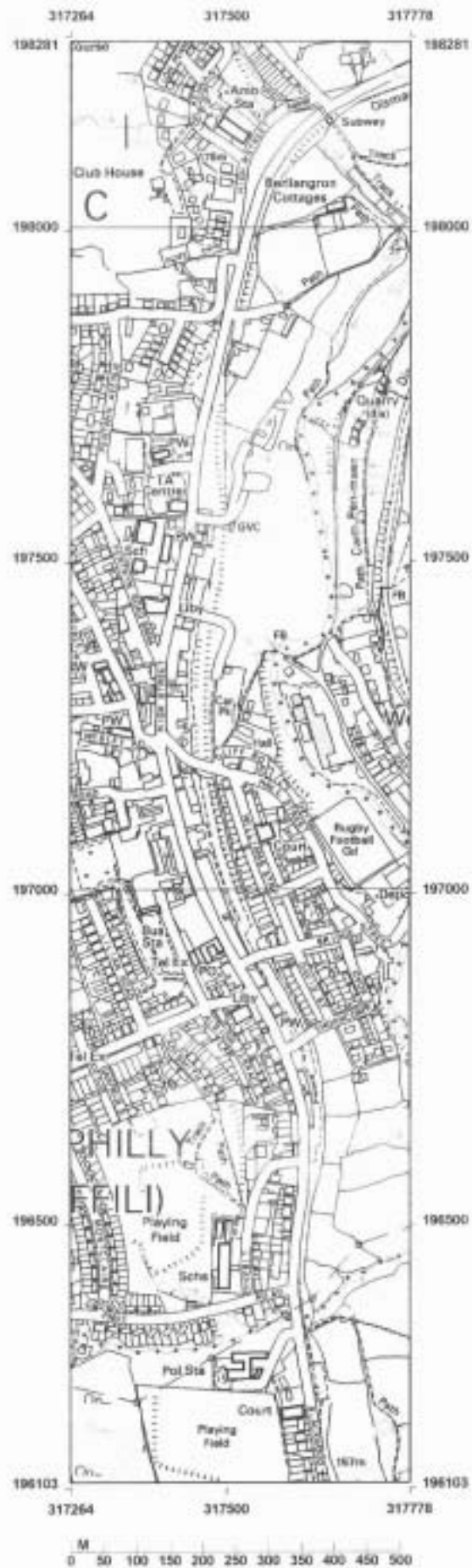
The approach to the problem has been a long-term holistic problem solving one. That is continuously being assessed and adapted as new legislation is introduced. The new power to seize vehicles under Section 59 Crime and Disorder Act 1998 will be used in future operations, alongside the Anti-Social Behaviour database, this will stop *Boy Racers* offending throughout Gwent and the displacement of the problem to other areas.

The divisional Anti- social database records the details of individuals, who are involved in behaviour such as the *Boy Racers*, that is anti-social nuisance behaviour to other members of the public. None of those involved ever came to notice on the Anti-Social Behaviour database for consideration for the Anti- social Behaviour Order application process.

Assessment continues through weekly section tasking in order to monitor the behaviour of a new generation of car owners. This project is still live and on going. The approach is a long term holistic one that has led to a 39% reduction in reports received.

List of Appendices

1. Map showing A4048 and High Street Blackwood.
2. Graph showing road traffic collisions and incident figures.
3. Letter of complaint.
4. List of offences to be considered by police officers.
5. Warning notice to drivers.
6. Caerphilly County Borough Council – Noise Warning Letter.
7. Caerphilly County Borough Council- Noise Warning Letter number two.
8. Press Releases.
9. WWW Cruiser Article.
10. Community Safety Strategy.



**MAP OF BLACKWOOD A1048 AND HIGH STREET
(NOT SHOWING RECENT TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT
CHANGES)**

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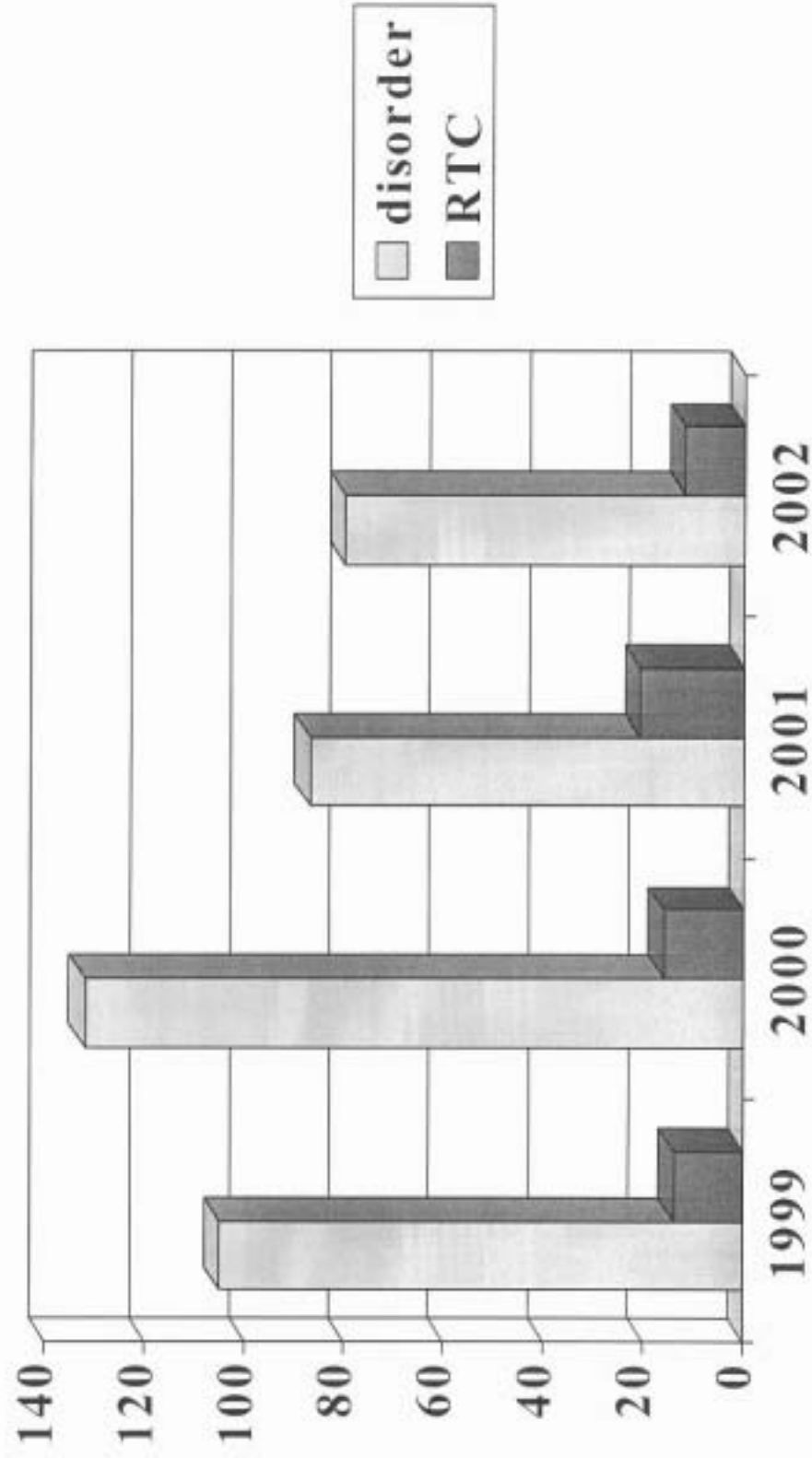
blue8world
22 May 2003



Recorded Complaints of Cruising /Disorder and Road Traffic Collisions

Blackwood Town Centre

For a Six month period Between October and November



15 August 2001

Pentwyn Court
Blackwood
Gwent
NP12 1HL

Inspector of Police
Blackwood Police Station
Blackwood
Gwent

Dear Sir

I wish to express my concern to yourself over the continuing excess noise and car racing suffered by myself and my fellow residents from the continual late night blaring of music from speeding and parked cars located around the north end of town.

The noise is so bad we feel imprisoned in our own homes, despite the recent purchase of double glazing for the house to try and minimise the noise disturbance. We are unable to open the windows at night on the side facing the main road. Quiet evenings spent in the comfort of our own back garden on a warm summer night are impossible due to the thunderous beat emitted from the numerous speakers that fill the boots of these cars.

My husband is a local shop owner in Blackwood and has to get up early every morning to prepare the shop to earn his living. The constant barrage of noise means he is unable to get a decent nights sleep while the noise maintains a constant thump, upto midnight, interspersed with the squeal of tyres as a handbrake turn or near miss is carried out. The stress that we have suffered is affecting our health and peace of mind.

This has gone on for far too long without the matter being adequately resolved, despite the constant calls to the station to report the noise. There have been a number of accidents and numerous near misses due to these individuals, and it will be sooner rather than later that an innocent person is killed or maimed by these vehicles. We feel that the police have been willing to tolerate these individuals to avoid moving the problem on. This policy does not cater for the law-abiding citizens of Blackwood who have to suffer this nuisance.

Yours Sincerely